

End unfunded mandates

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Special To The Tampa Tribune

"Unfunded mandates" is an unusual term for most people. Yet unfunded mandates affect all Floridians, which is why we believe it's important that they be stopped.

A mandate is a program or service that the state or federal government requires local governments to provide, but they do not provide funding to pay for it. The local community has to spend your tax dollars to pay for a program or service that was not requested or supported by you and your community.

Each year, local residents have the opportunity through public hearings to give input into what they want their tax dollars spent on. With unfunded mandates, your voice is not heard. Many times, the Florida Legislature is listening to the voices of special-interest lobbyists when they decide to approve these destructive unfunded mandates, not the local taxpayer responsible for footing the bill.

This year, the Florida Association of Counties and Florida League of Cities are proposing solutions to reduce these costly unfunded mandates. The goal is to free up your tax dollars so they continue to be spent on critical local services. When the state's unfunded mandates deplete your local government's budget, important local services may have to be reduced or possibly even cut. Is that fair to you?

We have proposed a "Local Saving Act" that describes more than a dozen main issues the Legislature could address that would reduce the burden on local taxpayers without impacting the state's budget.

Here's an example of an expensive unfunded mandate: Before 2005, the state funded all juvenile detention facilities. In 2006 state legislators decided to allow the Department of Juvenile Justice to bill counties \$100 million for a share of the costs to provide detention for juvenile offenders awaiting trial. But your county has no say in how those juvenile offenders are housed or treated. The state runs the program and now requires counties to pay the bills.

Another crippling mandate is the runaway pension costs for police officers and firefighters that threaten to put Florida's cities on a road to financial ruin. These are state-mandated "extra" pension benefits that have already forced cities to spend more than \$345 million in tax revenues on new pension benefits since 1999. This is much-needed money that could have gone to provide tax relief for local property owners.

While we respect and honor the work of police officers and firefighters, the current system of "extra" pension benefits cannot be sustained without significant property tax increases on our citizens.

Unfunded mandates increase the power of the state while decreasing the power of our citizens. They disrupt the fundamental democratic relationship between citizens and the leaders they elect to protect their communities and quality of life.

This is why we urgently ask that you take the time to call Tallahassee today and ask your state senator and representative to end these unfunded mandates and to support the Local Savings Act to protect local citizens.